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Post-Disaster Tourism Recovery in Nepal: A Review of Resilience Frameworks and Lessons from the 2015 Earthquake and the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

In the relatively short period of five years alone, the tourism industry in Nepal has suffered two of the biggest shocks in its contemporary history; the Nepal Gorkha earthquake of 2015 and the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic. Collectively, the two incidents trampled down tourist inflows, livelihoods, and infrastructure, heritage sites and the entire economy. In this paper, the existing literature on the recovery of Nepal tourism in the aftermath of the disaster is reviewed in the context of the existing resilience and crisis management models. Based on the peer reviewed articles, institutional reports and policy documents published between 2015 and 2024, the paper synthesises the peer reviewed articles, institutional reports, and policy documents. The review concludes that in the wake of the earthquake that wiped out about half of Nepal's nominal GDP and damaged heritage infrastructure in dozens of districts, tourism has recovered rapidly and has even exceeded pre-disaster levels of arrivals. The pandemic, in turn, caused a more profound,

and lasting collapse, with a slow increase toward pre-pandemic levels by the mid-2020s. The destination marketing, multi-stakeholder coordination, community-led resilience, volunteer tourism as a niche segment, heritage-led recovery and the Build Back Better philosophy are recurrent enablers of recovery. The persistence of challenges such as poor crisis preparedness, slow heritage reconstruction, over-reliance on one source-market, low per-tourist spending, poor infrastructure, and uneven distribution of benefits of recovery have been persistent obstacles to recovery promotion. The paper suggests a combined resilience model to the tourism sector in Nepal and outlines the future research direction, arguing that to convert recovery into a true resilience, long-term structural support, participatory governance, and structural flexibility are all required.

Introduction

Nepal lies close to the centre of the tourism sector in the country. The sector also played a vital role in providing over one million direct and indirect jobs, before COVID-19 (World Bank, 2022). The natural endowment of the country is remarkable: eight of the fourteen global peaks above 8000 metres elevate on its territory and its biodiversity spans the length and breadth of the territory, down to the tropical lowlands of the country on the one hand, and to the high-alpine zone, on the other hand, which extends as far west as the border of Switzerland and France. This has assisted Nepal in forging a unique identity on the global tourist map as well as a long tradition of hospitality (Upadhyaya, 2019). Arrivals had been increasing steadily since a trickle in the 1960s and 1970s it is now a record 1,197,191 visitors in 2019 (Nepal Tourism Board [NTB], 2024). However the road was never paved and to have been hit by two recent shocks has put the sector to the test.

The 7.8 magnitude earthquake of the Gorkha earthquake on 25 April 2015, which caused the death of 8,979 people, and injured more than 22,300; damage to the economy to the tune of USD 9.4 billion, or approximately half of the Nepalese nominal GDP at the time (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2015). The destruction of almost half a million private homes was also accompanied by serious damage to 2,656 government buildings, avalanches on Mount Everest and the Langtang Valley, and the destruction of tourism infrastructure in 31 districts, 14 of which were severely damaged (NPC, 2015). In 20 districts, most of the monuments listed include irreplaceable structures that are part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Kathmandu Valley (Shakya, 2022). With its epicentre in Barpak, a village of Gurung and Ghale in Gorkha, the disaster changed the homogeneous traditional architecture in the Gurung and Ghale villages into what locals described as a heterogeneous confusing landscape (Kunwar & Karki, 2020). The numbers of tourist arrivals plummeted to 538,970 in 2015, compared to 790,118 the year prior and the shock was felt throughout the hotels, trekking agencies, airlines, handicraft enterprises and community-based tourism projects (Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation [MoCTCA], 2020).

COVID-19 came in at the beginning of 2020 and left a more significant and protracted impact. Tourism was only just rising once more with a record number crossing the one-million arrivals mark in 2018 and a high of 1,197,191 was reached in 2019. Travel bans and border closures coupled with flight cancellations and widespread health fears drove the number of

arrivals down to 230,085 in 2020 followed by 150,962 in 2021- the lowest numbers seen since 1977 (NTB, 2024). Mostly the arrivals during some months effectively became zero. Initially launched with a much-publicized campaign and a large amount of public funds, the Visit Nepal 2020 campaign had transformed into a symbol of the setbacks of the pandemic period (Nepali Times, 2023). The damage had long since surpassed the arrival figures: the revenue streams dried up, mass unemployment swept through with tourism-based communities, and weaknesses in the governance of tourism and its preparedness to crises became transparent just as households were starting to recover after the earthquake (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2021). Framing this moment as one of the key attributes of the so-called so-called Virocene epoch when viral activity gained a central place in forming human nature-nature relationships and redefining the very logic of mobility and tourism itself.

The feature of two disasters of such magnitude striking the same tourism ecosystem over the span of one decade can be unique in providing a solid studying setting during the post-severe disaster recovery period. The scholarship of tourism crisis and disaster has grown significantly with some of the earliest works performed by Faulkner (2001), Ritchie (2004, 2009), Kunwar (2016), Hall et al. (2018), and Sigala (2020) applied in relation to disaster situations all over the world. Nonetheless, according to a review of 142 articles on tourism risk, crisis, disaster management by Ritchie and Jiang (2019), there is a lack of sound conceptual foundation in much of the literature and very little consideration of consecutive or cascading disasters in the context of the developing countries. Mair et al. (2016) also argue that more specific research agenda should focus on strategies of post-disaster recovery. Kunwar (2022), further contends that even the research on COVID-19 in the future has not always been theorized, casting doubt on the future role played by research in building the theory of tourism.

In the present case, the paper critically synthesizes existing literature on the topic of post disaster tourism recovery in Nepal in the context of the 2015 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of recognised models of resilience and crisis management. The review will aim to (a) follow the trends and key drivers that have driven the recovery of tourism in Nepal after the two disasters; (b) test the applicability of commonly used crisis management and resilience models in Nepal; (c) identify the enablers, constraints and lessons that have emerged during the recovery process; and (d) make recommendations on future research and policy. The review is based on peer-reviewed articles, institutional reports, policy documents and selected grey literature published between 2015 and 2024 inform the review, as they provide a decade-long perspective on tourism resilience in Nepal. The paper has been structured in five sections, which include, this introduction, literature review covering the theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, discussion, which draws the cross-cutting themes and lessons and finally a conclusion giving the policy implications and future research directions.

Literature review

Theoretical foundations of tourism crisis and disaster management

Even though the words, crisis and disaster are readily interchangedly, scholars have found it useful to draw some meaningful differences. Faulkner (2001) felt a disaster to be

event where an enterprise is confronted by sudden and unpredictable catastrophic changes over which it has limited control, compared to a crisis being at least partly due to internal organisational structures. Kunwar (2022) observes, though, that in the COVID-19 literature the two terms have been interchangeably used in huge proportions since such large-scale shocks of this nature are bound to cause both internal and external challenges. According to Pauchant and Mitroff (1992 as cited in Kunwar, 2022), a crisis was defined as a disruption that physically affects a system as a whole, threatening the basic assumptions and existential base of a system. These conceptual subtleties are important in the modelling of Nepal recovery since in the 2015 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic they differ radically in their inner-outer profile. Kunwar (2016) further situates these concepts within the wider vocabulary of safety, security and surety in tourism, noting how risk, vulnerability, hazard and emergency each carry distinct implications for how destinations prepare for and respond to shocks.

The six-stage model of tourism disaster management which is provided by Faulkner (2001) pre-event, prodromal, emergency, intermediate, long-term recovery, and resolution are a key reference model. The stages are accompanied by management activities like risk assessment, contingency planning, destination marketing and communication and community engagement. According to Faulkner, tourism was especially incapacitated against crises despite being very vulnerable to external crises. The framework has since been used in such incidents like in the United Kingdom in the foot- and mouth disease outbreak (Miller and Ritchie, 2003) and in the United Kingdom in the Katherine flood (Faulkner and Vikulov, 2001).

Ritchie (2004, 2009) expanded this work by proposing a strategic crisis management model which is organised around three broad phases, i.e. pre-crisis (prevention, planning, and environmental scanning), crisis response (implementation, communication, and resource management) and post-crisis (resolution, review, and organisational learning). Ritchie also made a distinction between sudden crises, where there is not much time to prepare and an emerging crisis where there is more time to prepare and the crisis can be partially anticipated. This difference comes in quite handy when trying to compare the suddenness of the earthquake of 2015 and the gradualness of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ritchie and Jiang (2019) have found using a curated review of 142 articles, three dominating themes, such as preparedness and planning, response and recovery, and resolution and reflection, and point out that empirical testing of crisis management frameworks are under-developed, and research is disproportionately focused on response and recovery. In the Nepali context, Kunwar (2016) has argued that the issues of crisis management, disaster management and the marketing approaches required for tourism revival remain comparatively under-examined, an observation that remains pertinent to the cases discussed in this review.

What was gradually being complemented is resilience which has replaced in available strands of literature previous frames of crisis management. In the tourism industry resilience is seen as the ability of a destination, an organisation or a community to absorb shocks, adapt and even transform without losing core functions and structures (Hall et al., 2018). This idea can be traced back to the ecological systems theory of Holling (1973), which is the capacity

of an eco system to take in a perturbation and still remain functional. Prayag (2020) reasoned that COVID-19 provided a reset button of how resilience is considered and executed in tourism, giving it a renewed focus on preparedness, adaptability and transformation. Kunwar (2022) supports this argument and suggests the macro-, meso- and micro-levels of resilience framework suggested by Prayag (2020) as a helpful agenda to analyse tourism systems, organisations, and individuals (employees, tourists, residents) during a pandemic. Developed as a dynamic resilience model which is based on the three capabilities including sensing (identifying threats and opportunities), seizing (allocating resources to respond) and transforming (reorganising routines and strategies) which Jiang et al. (2021) developed was built round resilience as an iterative process rather than fixed state.

In a recent systematic review (n=48 studies) of literature on building tourism resilience to disasters, four governance modalities relevant to building tourism resilience to disasters were found: risk assessment and mitigation, collaborative planning and policy development, community empowerment and capacity building, and adaptive, context-specific governance (Alonso et al., 2024). Based on ten dynamic capabilities such as replicating and reconfiguring to adaptive, innovative, and regenerative capabilities, which are drawn on the basis of qualitative data of 30 tourism firms in Bangladesh, Prayag et al. (2024) traced how they are activated in various stages of the process of disaster. The sense of innovation, flexibility, and human resource development as a collaborative practice that reduces destination vulnerability, is reinforced in the collaboration study by Santos et al. (2023), in a meta-analysis of 36 crisis management frameworks (which are predominantly based on natural disaster research, rather than on health-related and man-made crises). and the study by Filimonau and De Coteau (2020) highlights the overall importance of innovation, flexibility and human resource development as a collaborative practice that reduces the destination vulnerability.

Another conceptual layer that is applicable to the Nepal case based on post-disaster tourism, is disaster tourism. Kunwar and Karki (2020) characterize disaster tourism as the tourism that is mainly recreational or leisure based and travels to areas that have experienced a disaster either by historical or natural causes. Based on the research of Foley and Lennon (1996), Stone, (2006) and Seaton (1996) they contend that post-disaster destinations like Barpak are a mix of dark attractions to death, memory, and the sociology of disaster and non-dark attractions due to its leisure aspect. The concept of their darventure, which is a combination of the dark and the adventure, is quite appropriate and caters to the needs of the frontier kinds of adventure tourism in mountain destinations, such as Nepal (Kunwar and Karki, 2020).

The Gorkha earthquake and the 2015 tourism recovery

When the earthquake struck the Nepalese tourism industry it was hit simultaneously along a number of different dimensions. With assistance of the European Union, the World Bank, and the United Nations, the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) which was prepared by the National Planning Commission estimated total impacts on tourism due to disasters to be around NPR 62.4 billion (NPC, 2015). The PDNA singled out tourism as being one of the hardest hit sectors given that it relies on infrastructure, heritage and international

confidence most of which were badly rattled. The Kathmandu Valley, including the Durbar Squares of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur, the complex of stupas, Swayambhunath, (and other hundreds of older temples and palaces) were severely damaged structurally (UNESCO, 2016). In Langtang, and the Everest region, landslides and avalanches disrupted trekking routes, and many hotels and restaurants needed to be rebuilt (Shakya, 2022).

Its post-thought is pretty much encompassed between Faulkner's (2001) emergency and intermediate stages. Communication of crisis was challenging, media coverage of the crisis was mostly negative and many governments have issued a travel warning to their citizens although much of the tourism infrastructure in Nepal had been spared. Beirman et al. (2018) report on the formation of the Nepal chapter of the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) into the Nepal Tourism Rapid Recovery Taskforce in just weeks, uniting the Nepal Tourism Board, the Ministry of Tourism, the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Nepal chapter, and its chapter in Nepal. The type of multi-stakeholder coordination that Ritchie (2009) deems a crucial element of the response stage, was evident in this quick mobilisation, which disproved the impression that the whole country was unsafe to travel to.

The Post-Disaster Recovery Framework (PDRF) issued by the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), in 2016 aligns recovery practices with the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, that was adopted only weeks before the earthquake (NRA, 2016). Build Back Better philosophy, adopted by the PDRF, is aimed at implementing changes in an attempt to deal with some foundational vulnerabilities (NPC, 2015). Short-term priorities in tourist tourism were seen to be stabilisation of heritage sites, conducting international marketing campaigns to restore the lost confidence, reorganisation of loans of the hotel and restaurant owners and temporary tax relief. Long-term priorities included rebranding the tourism identity of Nepal, supporting tourist entrepreneurs (both rural and urban) and strengthening the sectoral resilience to future shocks (NRA, 2016).

The recovery in Nepal was not that slow as compared to the international standards. Based on ARIMA time-series analysis of tourism data between a 1990 to 2018 the post-earthquake period, Min et al. (2020) found an unexpected demand effect as the post-earthquake period generated more expectation demand with a quicker tempo relative to the traditional leisure tourists. The post-disaster curiosity and solidarity travel pattern is reflected herein (Biran et al., 2014). Beirman et al. (2018) present a thesis of the high-resilience core market: that idealistic young travellers had long been among those destinations whose long history of high-resilience core market in attracting idealistic young travellers gave it a recovery, which many other destinations lacked. Kunwar and Karki (2020) also note that a devastated, post-disaster Barpak was visited with post-disaster curiosity by a series of post-disaster visitors, attracted by epicentre tourism, the memorialisation of the disaster, and adventure travel of the Manaslu-region, an early indicator that disaster-affected regions could be repositioned, with care, into niche tourism destinations.

As of 2017, Nepal had surpassed the target of one million international arrivals; this is significantly lower than this figure was in 2017 (Harper, 2023). The recorded arrivals put the country on the third-place as the fastest-growing-destination in Asia with 1,173,072

international arrivals in 2018. There are multiple reasons which prompted such recovery. The focus was placed on destination marketing and the Nepal Tourism Board focused on the idea that core attractions, which include mountains, trekking trails, wildlife reserves and spiritual sites are largely intact and are open (Harper, 2023). This approach is consistent with Kunwar's (2016) observation that new marketing strategies aimed at restoring tourist confidence are central to the revival of a destination after a crisis. The government agencies and international organisations (UNESCO, UNDP and PATA) and the actors in the private sector (you know, the companies and organisations involved in charity and awarding grants and other financial assistance) made it possible to coordinate their messages and investment to align. Community based tourism, particularly in areas whose impact was minimal due to the earthquake, helped people earn their livelihood and keep Nepal on the global radar (Upadhayaya, 2019).

Reconstruction of heritage slowed but was able to be an important component to the recovery narrative. On salvage and inventory and safekeeping of artefacts UNESCO has worked with the Department of Archaeology (UNESCO, 2016). On earthquake recovery of artefacts UNESCO has partnered with the Department of Archaeology (UNESCO, 2016). The city of Bhaktapur turned out to be a particularly impressive example of locally-led, heritage-oriented recovery with the community participation in financing, planning, and labour, as well as the formal institutional support of the process (Arora, 2020). According to the Department of Archaeology (2025), 815 out of 920 of the affected heritage sites had been fully rebuilt, although marquee projects remained unfinished such as the new Dharahara Tower. Shakya (2022) follows the incremental reconstruction of heritage in Kathmandu valley and the paper traces the difficulties in the reconstruction process, such as bureaucratic complexity, lack of funds, conflicting international conservation norms with the local practice of religion, and ineffective trade-offs between security and authenticity. The detailed description of the reconstruction of the village of Barpak given by Kunwar and Karki (2020) strengthens this image: the originally homogeneous and slate-roofed buildings of the village gave way to an unequal mixture of concrete houses and CGI-roofed houses, and many residents experienced the sensation of cognitive dissonance and identity loss in the new landscape.

COVID-19 and the collapse of the tourism industry

COVID-19 has impacted tourism sector of Nepal in ways, which are dissimilar and different, not just similar, to the earthquake. In areas where the earthquake was both geographically compact and physically disastrous, the pandemic was world wide and operationally disastrous, halting the whole international network of travel. Buildings were damaged in the earthquake, yet there was demand hazardous to the earthquake, namely the demand in underlying demand. The pandemic destroyed demand in underlying demand, by closing borders, cancelling flights, requiring quarantines, and creating widespread health anxieties (Sigala, 2020). The earthquake similarly had a fairly good logical conclusion and the pandemic created such an uncertainty period with wave after wave it was virtually impossible to create coherent recovery planning.

Kunwar (2022) frames these dynamics by broader arguments about health crisis and tourism wherein fear, mistrust of institutions, uncertainty and a sense of widespread lack

of safety are often increasing accompaniments of epidemics. Using the framework proposed by Schimmenti et al. (2020), Kunwar (2022) outlines the four horsemen of fear framework, which prominently features fear of the body, fear of significant others, fear of not knowing, and fear of taking action as key aspects of bodily, interpersonal, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions of fear during the pandemic. He further talks about the protection motivation theory and the health belief model, which helps in discussing why tourists regardless of borders being reopened, continued to take into consideration perceived health threats, self-efficacy, and response efficacy when they made travel decisions (Kunwar, 2022). In the case of Nepal where most tourists have had tourism activities based on the close host-guest contact that is associated with homestays, trekking lodges and cultural events, the psychological reactions were noteworthy.

On 24 March 2020, Nepal enacted a nationwide lockdown which suspended any international travel, halted trekking permits, closed national parks and shut down hotels and restaurants. The consequence of that was almost complete downfall. International arrivals fell from 1,197,191 in 2019 to 230,085 in 2020, an 80.8% drop, and continued to slide to 150,962 in 2021 as the country faced a brutal second wave (NTB, 2024). This economic shock was very sharp and uneven. Informal workers, including guides, porters, homestay staff, vendors of handicrafts, and seasonal hotel and restaurant staff, disproportionately bear the burden, they have a limited access to formal contracts or social safety nets (UNWTO, 2021). Distress was especially severe in the areas of trekking, like Annapurna, Everest and Langtang where other forms of livelihood were restricted (Kunwar, 2021). Kunwar (2022) also observes that the pandemic instigated xenophobia attitudes and stigmatisation in most regions of the world with effects unwelcoming to both tourists and are destination communities; in a South Asian country, incidents of fear, such as suicides attributed to possible infection, and social rejection, were illustrative of how anxieties produced during the pandemic were now being tapped into extremely localised forms of harm.

The structural weaknesses introduced by the crisis were the result of the steady growth in the arrival numbers concealed by the structural weakness. An average tourist spending in Nepal was close to USD 48 a day, which is one-fourth of the world average and one-third of the spending by similar destinations (Thailand and India) (World Bank, 2022). This was indicative of the Nepal destination and its role as a low-cost destination with a limited number of high value tourism products and facilities which limited the quality and diversity of visitor experience. The Nepali Times (2023) also stated that the share of foreign exchange earnings obtained by tourism in Nepal had decreased significantly since in 1981, tourism received 36.8% of foreign exchange earnings the Nepal government received, compared to only 4.6% in 2019. Though this made tourism less macro-economically significant, its symbolic and political relevance in the transformation of tourism remained powerful but in a paradoxical manner it might have played a role in the less urgent urgency in policymakers and politicians to transform the sector.

The pandemic recovery has been slower as compared to the earthquake. With travel restrictions being fully lifted and pent-up demand being unleashed, arrivals improved by 614,869 in 2022 -exceeding half of pre-pandemic levels (NTB, 2024). The gain has picked up

in 2023 with Nepal registering 1,014,882 arrivals. By 2024, arrivals had reached 1,147,567, around 96% of the 2019 figure and the highest since the pandemic began (NTB, 2024). India was the leading market of source followed by the United States, China, the United Kingdom and Bangladesh. The number of Chinese tourists visiting the country leveled off the mark of 169,543 visiting Chinese tourists in 2019 which balanced between the zero-COVID controls imposed on China and the debriefing of the Chinese populace who was slowly getting fed up with the zero-COVID restrictions (NTB, 2024).

The rebound had a few factors that were in support. Two new international airports, Bhairahawa, the gateway to Lumbini, and Pokhara, the gateway to the Annapurna region, increased the capacity of aviation, although there was a cloud of political controversy over the promotion of the two (NTB, 2024). The international constraint was raised via events like Nepal premier league, world Buddhist conference, international balloon festival, and taking part in major travel fairs. The Nepali-based, nature-oriented, outdoor-based product, also suited the tastes and preferences of post-pandemic consumers, since open-air experiences and not having to travel too far attracted most consumers (Nepali Times, 2023). Nevertheless, infrastructure vulnerability remains: at the end of 2024, Tribhuvan international Airport shut down its runway to make maintenance and work on the runway during the peak season, which disrupted international flights and reminded the stakeholders of the vulnerability that lies on the runway (NTB, 2024).

Heritage-led recovery and cultural resilience

The temples, palaces, monasteries and traditional urban fabric in Nepal all are not only tourism attractions but also a vital part of the religious practice, social life and identity of the citizens of Nepal (UNESCO, 2016). It was not only the economic impact of heritage sites on tourism, but also a psychosocial and spiritual disconnect with heritage sites, whose daily operations and organisation of life centred around heritage sites. This is examined in detail when Kunwar and Karki (2020) discuss Bārpak, a locality where the death of homogeneous and traditional forms of building left residents to grapple with on whether the new built form was good or bad, urban or rural, attractive or repulsive. They note that, notwithstanding the infringement, the local death rituals, memorialisation practices, and the yearly mediation between the living and the dead were still the strong sources of the social cohesion and dark-tourism interest, potentially.

The heritage reconstruction became such a controversial area whereby international conventions of conservation, national politics, and local religious beliefs sometimes pulled in divergent directions. UNESCO and other international agencies highlighted the concept of maintaining historical authenticity, favouring repair over replacement, with many communities preferring to replace the broken religious objects or architectural elements with intact ones, in keeping with the Hindu and Buddhist customs of worship of intact religious images, instead of damaged, broken or tattered ones (Shakya, 2022). These tensions highlight the significance of small context-specific, culturally sensitive heritage-led recovery, something that reflects the adaptive, context-specific governance modality that is found in the resilience literature (Alonso et al., 2024).

A good example of a highly informative case of locally-led heritage recovery is Bhaktapur. Five years of coordination by user committees that managed funds, planning and integration of institutional support with community contributions of cash, material and volunteer labour, led to about 80% of restoration and reconstruction being done within five years of the earthquake (Arora, 2020). The revival of old festivals, in particular, Gai Jatra became an effective means of communal mourning, bonding the community and restoring the normal way of life. The Bhaktapur experience demonstrates how cultural practice and built heritage can play both the roles of engines of social resilience and physical reconstruction; a lesson that has many implications far beyond Nepal.

Discussion

A number of cross-cutting lessons are created out of this synthesis. To start with, the six-phase disaster management model that is proposed by Faulkner (2001) would be a useful descriptive map of the recovery in Nepal, although it does not reflect the cyclic, non-linear and politically charged nature of recovery in the context of Nepal created and confronting a developing nation. The establishment and the PATA Rapid Recovery Taskforce were signs of institutional responsiveness that were in line with the intermediate, as well as the long-term phases as proposed by Faulkner. However, gradual heritage rebuilding, asymmetrical distribution of the benefits of the recovery, and structural vulnerabilities persisting at the beginning of the pandemic all hint at a sizeable gap between the prescriptions on the framework and the way it would be implemented on-the-ground. The compounding actual effect of one disaster after another, a fact Nepal had to endure as the pandemic struck prior to earthquake recovery efforts being complete.

Second, the model of strategic crisis management by Ritchie (2004, 2009) with its focus on the pre-crisis planning has only been operationalised in part and offers normative guidance. The lack of the scheme of managing the crisis of tourism in detail prior to the earthquake or the pandemic suggests that the responses were more of a reaction as opposed to proactive response. Although PATA Taskforce and NTB campaigns revealed comparatively good crisis communication, there is no indication of some continuity of organisational learning through crisis communication between the two disasters. The pandemic in this sense has highlighted how the lessons of the earthquake on preparedness, coordination of the stakeholders and resilience of the communities were never really absorbed into the structures of governance: a failure of the stage of resolution and reflection, which Ritchie singled out as the core of long-term resilience.

Third, the dynamic resilience model by Jiang et al. (2021) is likely to provide the most promising method of analysis of the experience in Nepal. This industry also showed sensing behaviour, in terms of having quick post earthquake damage assessments, along with the identification of resilient niches such as volunteer tourism and adventure tourism. The aspect of the capabilities that were captured was evident through the targeted marketing campaigns, mobilisation of the international partnerships as well as events and festivals as recovery signals. Re-embracing of Build Back Better principles, searching at sustainable tourism alternatives, and building new international airports all surfaced as transforming

capabilities. However, the real essence of true change can be called into question. The same structural weaknesses, which were present before the year 2015 such as weak planning of crisis preparedness, dependence on a particular source-market, low amounts of money spent per-tourist, and a weak transport and communications infrastructure, continued to persist into the period of the pandemic and were re-exposed due to the pandemic.

Fourth, the review demonstrates a shape of a significant lack of connection between macro-level policy frameworks (PDNA, PDRE, the Sendai Framework) and micro-level experiences of the tourism-dependent communities, especially those found in rural and remote regions. The empirical studies made on the basis of household survey in the earthquake-afflicted districts have revealed that, although the PDNA brought to the fore some vulnerabilities (women, poor households), it failed to bring into the limelight other types of vulnerabilities (carrying significant debt), resulting in slower recovery. Although important, the following priorities of PDNA including resuming income and reconstruction of the houses did not effectively address health and psychosocial well-being. Even though resilience features in communities take a central place in policy discourses and are demonstrated in such cases as Bhaktapur, they require a significant long-term investment in the local capacity, in the exclusionary governance, and equal distribution of resources that have not always become reality in the diverse Nepal with a range of different geographies and communities (Kunwar, 2021). This picture is reinforced by the contributions of Kunwar and Karki (2020) on Barpak: residents reported that they actively participated in the work of reconstruction but were uncertain about whether the new architectural landscape would be attractive or repelling to the tourists, which left the lack of any resolved tensions between technical recovery and community meaning-making.

Fifth, when comparing the two disasters some crucial differences emerge with regards to recovery dynamics that have an impact on the crisis management theory. The earthquake struck on supply end of the tourism infrastructure, heritage, and transport that the earthquake caused and they still remained latent and could be activated through marketing, building of confidence and repair of the infrastructure. Instead, the pandemic nullified demand itself when borders were shut and health considerations were of utmost importance, and demand-side interventions were more or less ineffective. This implies that models of tourism crisis management should draw a clearer line between the supply-side disruption where marketing and investments in infrastructure can expedite recovery and the demand side disruption where much can be done to recover the situation beyond the control of the destination being promoted. The situation that volunteer tourism could continue to operate in its resilient niche during the post-disaster period, yet not in the period of the pandemic - because solidarity and altruism will not act as catalysts across the closed borders - consequently reinforced the context-specificity of recovery.

Sixth, the sequential nature of two large disrupters in Nepal gives rise to urgent consideration of the cumulative nature of vulnerability that, in turn, is not adequately addressed in the existing literature. Though all of the disasters had been researched separately, the experience of residing in both a decade of rolling disruption, partial recovery, and new

disruption. Based on the limited resources spent by communities to repair their post-earthquake restoration efforts, the pandemic threw them back to a situation where their debts grew higher than before, as revenue sources dried out when people stopped traveling two or more years. This cumulative vulnerability would have worn away and not constructed it adaptive capacity, making the more rosy resilience discourses more complex. The sequential-disaster dynamics of tourism-dependent developing economies should be probed in future research and it should be scrutinized whether there are some thresholds beyond which the complex shocks compound each other and the adaptive capacity of a particular economy is surpassed.

Last but not least, the tension presented in the review is that between the numerical recovery in the form of arrivals in Nepal that are close to levels that existed prior to 1994 and 1997 events respectively. The fact that, with the situation almost returned to a pre-pandemic baseline, in 2024, the industry will reach well-better-best outcomes, is in itself a genuine accomplishment, yet, should the underlying conditions that have previously predisposed the industry to respond differently to the many new challenges in a higher-order environment remain in place, the industry itself would remain exposed to future shocks. The key to true resiliency, offering the opportunity both to restore arrivals and to restructure the entire system of tourism, is to align it with the macro-, meso-, and micro-level resilience agenda Kunwar (2022) suggests to implement in the post-COVID era.

Conclusion

This review has taken a critical approach to examine the literature on post-disaster tourism recovery in Nepal, and has brought together the evidence regarding the Gorkha earthquake of 2015 and the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of established resilience/crisis management models, including that of Faulkner (2001), Ritchie (2004, 2009) and Jiang et al. (2021). The experience of Nepal demonstrates an astounding ability to recover: the nation has exceeded the level of arrivals prior to the earthquake much sooner and has come close to reaching the world travel figures before the pandemic. Meanwhile, systemic vulnerabilities hamper real change toward empirical tourism less closely associated with profit maximization. The case of two major shocks striking the same communities, institutions, and economic systems in one decade provides a particularly informative case study in understanding the ways that tourism destinations in developing nations cope with compounding crises and whether or not recovery can be transformed into resilience.

These have several implications in policies and practices. Nepal requires a comprehensive, multi-hazard tourism crisis management plan which has natural disaster preparedness, pandemic and health emergency response, contingency planning considering political instability and adaptation to climate change. The present lack of such a plan regardless of the repeated show of being vulnerable to geophysical and biological shocks, is a terrible governance gap. It should focus on strategic and long term investment on tourism diversification including community based, agro, wellness, spiritual, cultural and creativity and high value eco-tourism to reduce dependence on mass trekking business as well as less profitable budget travel and to boost per-tourist spending. The operation of tourism by increasing efficiency and

responsiveness to crisis and visibility of remote tourism products can be improved through the investment in digital infrastructure (online booking, virtual destination marketing, digital payments and digital literacy programmes to tourism entrepreneurs). Fair recovery processes must explicitly prioritize groups of people who bear unfair shares of disaster impact, but are under-assisted during recovery, and they include women, ethnic minority, informal sector workers and remote communities living in the mountains. Culturally sensitive, community-based strategies should be sped up to conserve heritage by drawing on experiences of other successful heritage conservation projects such as Bhaktapur. Close or cross sector coordination between tourism, disaster management, health, transport, heritage and local governance bodies will be critical to provide a more integrated response to future disruptions.

In theory, the review recommends that the current crisis management and resilience frameworks, despite being useful as a tool of analysis, must be altered to reflect the realities of developing economies which are prone to disasters. The linear stage model used by Faulkner as well as the strategic framework used by Ritchie can provide good normative guidelines, but they do not pay enough attention to political, institutional, and resource constraints that define recovery in a situation such as Nepal. The dynamic resilience perspective by Jiang et al., (2021) is more promising and it should be expanded to incorporate the compounding sequential disasters, the role of heritage and cultural identity in the resilience of communities and structural inequities that shape the beneficiary of recovery. The insights provided by the scholarly research on disaster tourism (Kunwar and Karki, 2020) and the studies conducted during the pandemic (Kunwar, 2022) imply that the further frameworks need to be provided to incorporate sociological, psychological, and cultural aspects in addition to the more familiar economic and managerial considerations.

There are limitations with this review. The use of English-language sources could have overlooked any of the existing Nepali-language scholarship and native knowledge. The narrative approach has a wide scope of coverage, but combines peer-reviewed and grey literature, and thus there is some variance in terms of quality of evidence. Arrivals by international tourists dominate this recovery indicators discussed here, which may underestimate the growth of domestic tourism, a fast-growing but under-researched segment in Nepal. The dynamism of the tourism environment also implies that in some way or the other, some of the figures and findings will already have been overtaken.

To follow the chart of community resilience through sequential catastrophes, longitudinal, mixed methods, research approaches could prove useful. Comparative studies with other places in the Himalayas and disaster prone destinations might help to clarify which will be context specific and which can be transferred. Empirical testing of dynamic models of resilience in Nepali tourism businesses, community based organisations, local governance bodies would enhance theory and give actionable information. Compounding factor in the vulnerability of tourism, such as climate change, should receive a lot greater attention due to accelerating glacial retreat and an increase in extreme weather. There is also a longstanding overdue research on the digital transformation as a recovery pathway and research on gender-disaggregated effects of disaster impact and recovery in tourism.

The tourism industry of Nepal has demonstrated that it is not impossible to recover the devastating shocks in a world limited in resources. Multiplying the recovery into real resilience, that is a institutional capacity, a community empowering itself, strategic diversification, well-developed infrastructure, a systemic addictiveness needed not only to take future shocks but to be better off in future than in present times. The lessons of the past decade which have been paid with the plight of the disaster-affected communities can be the foundation underpinning a stronger tourism future provided that they are systematically learnt, institutionalized and acted upon.

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